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THE WAR AND
EMPLOYMENT

BY

A. L. BOWLEY, Sc.D.

PROFESSOR OF STATISTICS IN THE UNIVERSITY OF LONDON

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THE WAR AND EMPLOYMENT¹

IMMEDIATELY before the declaration of war employment was good in the industries of the United Kingdom taken as a whole. The depression of 1908-9 had given place to good trade in 1911-12, and to such industrial prosperity in 1913 that till October of that year unemployment had been less than in any years for which comparable records exist. Some slight signs of reaction appeared in the winter 1913-14, but trade recovered in the spring and was in April only inferior to that of the previous year. During June and July, however, the adverse symptoms spread : the production of pig iron, the raw material of all the iron and steel trades, had fallen off considerably ; coal mines were not so busy ; shipbuilding showed some slackness of demand ; the woollen industry was definitely on the down grade, though the worsted manufacturers were still busy meeting the great American demand which had arisen from their lowered tariff. The most serious trouble was in Lancashire ; employment in the cotton mills was still good in July, but it was quite definitely foreseen that the future demand would be less and arrangements had been made for working short time for three months. There were no labour disputes of any magnitude unsettled, except the long-drawn-out trouble in the London building trade, which was reported in the *Labour Gazette* to be practically at an end. The statistics of foreign trade were by no

¹ This pamphlet contains the substance of a lecture delivered at the London School of Economics, February 15, 1915.

means unsatisfactory, but below their maximum. In brief, there was cause for anxiety, but little to show whether the coming autumn would begin a period of depression or only mark a temporary reaction after two years of great prosperity.

The declaration of war fortunately came in a week when many of the commercial and of the industrial population were taking or about to take holiday. A complete stoppage of production for a fortnight would have been a serious injury only to unskilled labour. By the end of a fortnight the paralysis caused by the shock was over, and it was possible to take stock of the position. New orders for export were, in the state of foreign credit, practically non-existent, and it was for the moment doubtful whether existing orders could be paid for or delivered. Many contracts in the home trade were cancelled. Industries producing luxuries or commodities whose purchase could be postponed were nearly stopped. Nevertheless, there is indisputable evidence for the statement that the total number of men completely unemployed at the end of August was less than in a month of trade depression of not unusual severity; for women a similar statement would have to be qualified, because a very large proportion of those still in employment were working short time. From September to the present date employment has continually improved, so that in February there is an unsatisfied demand in several occupations, while the unemployment of women is on a quite moderate scale, and, though short time is still prevalent in some important industries, in others there is even a balance of overtime.

Before we trace the change of employment in detail or in the aggregate, it is well to consider the nature

and adequacy of the published information. The index most generally quoted is based on the number of members of certain trade unions, whose aggregate membership is nearly a million, who are reported as unemployed at the end of each month; this number expressed as a percentage of the membership is published monthly in the *Labour Gazette* of the Board of Trade, and it is shown for 1913 and 1914 in column 1 of the table on p. 7. The trade unions concerned are in the main composed of skilled workmen; engineering accounts for a quarter of all, women are hardly represented, of building operatives only carpenters are included in any large numbers, and the loss of work by textile operatives and coal miners is not fully accounted for. This index, valuable as it is, is by no means necessarily representative of the movement of the whole volume of employment.

Since the Insurance Act came into force, very complete statistics are available as to the number of men unemployed in those industries where insurance against unemployment is compulsory—that is, building, works of construction, engineering, shipbuilding, and subordinate trades. The number out of work, expressed as a percentage of all so insured, gives very accurate information over an important, though limited, area of industry, containing about 2,500,000 men. These percentages, given in column 2, show fluctuations similar to those in column 1, though the movement is not so violent. In neither case are men out of work owing to labour disputes, or men who have joined the Army or Navy, counted as unemployed.

Information of a different and much less definite character is obtained from other records of the Labour Exchanges. The most significant statement is that which

gives the numbers of persons registered as desiring work (or a change of work) and on the 'live register' at selected dates. These numbers cannot be expressed as percentages, since there is no definition or knowledge of the population to which they relate, that is the persons who would apply to the Labour Exchanges when out of work. Columns 3 and 4 show the numbers of adult men and women, employed in industries other than those dealt with in column 2, who were on the live register in various months. For men the movement in uninsured trades is remarkably like that in insured trades ; if the denominator is taken as 6,000,000, the percentages are nearly identical. For women, who are hardly represented at all in the earlier columns, the movement is quite different, and in their case the impression obtained is somewhat misleading, because a larger proportion than formerly have been induced to register since the war, owing to pressure from the administrators of the relief funds. Since domestic servants have been affected rather differently from those in industry and have also taken much more freely to registration, column 5 is given to show the effect on women in industry.

The figures so far relate almost entirely to persons wholly unemployed. The *Labour Gazette* also gives information as to the actual numbers employed month by month by a large number of firms in the textile trades and by smaller numbers in boot-making, food preparation, and some other industries. These trades are imperfectly represented in column 1, and hence this record is of special importance. In column 6 the results are shown ; thus for every thousand persons employed in 1913, there were 991 employed by the same firms in the first half of 1914, 988 in July, 344 at the end of August, and so on. The industries concerned

MEMBERS OF UNEMPLOYMENT.

The numbers in columns 1 and 2 refer to the end of the month, in 3, 4, and 5 to the middle, in 6, 7, 8, and 9 to the end, and in 10 to the latter half.

¹ i.e. not insured for unemployment, though insured for illness.

employ a large proportion of women. The volume of employment depends, however, not only on the number of persons at work, but on the length of time they work. In the textile and mining industries and in some others it is the custom to spread work when it is scarce among nearly all the employees, so that there is little complete unemployment but much short time. We are fortunately able to make this more complete measure in the industries dealt with in column 6, for we have also records of total wages paid, and rates of wages hardly changed in these industries in 1913 or 1914. Column 7 shows that, for every £1,000 paid in wages per week in 1913, £980 was paid weekly in July 1914, and only £695 in the last week in August. The facts shown in columns 6 and 7 are very much affected by the cotton industry, whose depression was only in part due to the war. If we take the same records, and, having eliminated cotton, proceed in the same way, we find (as in columns 8 and 9) that the relative losses of employment and of wages are much smaller.

The *Labour Gazette* contains further information as to some other industries, of which coal-mining is the most important; here the average number of days worked, each pit being treated as a unit, forms a useful index (column 10).

Besides these Reports, which are available in the ordinary course, the Board of Trade and the Local Government Board have co-operated in the collection of special information as to the amount and nature of distress and unemployment arising out of the war, primarily for the use of the administrators of the Prince of Wales's Fund. Two detailed Reports¹ have been published by the Board of Trade, and these form the

¹ Cd. 7703, Cd. 7755, prices 6d. and 1½d., Wyman & Sons.

basis of many of the statements in the following pages. The method employed was very similar to that used for columns 6-9 above; but the inquiry was very much wider, extending (with certain exceptions) to all districts, all industries, all firms who employed more than 100 persons, and a considerable sample of smaller firms. Since (as is general in such cases) the furnishing of the information was not compulsory, only about two-thirds of the *questionnaires* issued were filled in and returned, but these were quite sufficiently numerous to give an adequate account. So far as private industry is concerned, there were very few serious omissions; but the transport trades (railways, cartage, tramways, docks) are not included in the main tables, no account is given of persons employed directly by the Government, and commerce and retailing are dealt with only in London. Questions were asked of each employer as to the number of persons (distinguishing male and female) employed in July, the numbers in September, in October, and in December, how many were on short time and how many on overtime, and how many were known to have joined His Majesty's forces. The general summary for industry is given on p. 10. In the occupations included there are about 7,000,000 males and 2,250,000 females. The number of men known by the employers to have joined the forces (about 900,000 in this group) includes both reservists called up and new recruits; but it is incomplete, because men who lost their work in the earlier months may have enlisted unknown to their last employers. The information as to employment in and enlisting from other industries is less definite; but it is certain that they have not only contributed their quota to the forces, but have also suffered less from want of work, since they consist mainly of workers in agriculture, on

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railways, and in docks, of which the first and second had from the beginning of the war no unusual surplus of labour, and the latter were immediately busy with military work during the short time that foreign trade was stagnant.

In addition to this main inquiry an even more detailed investigation was made for London as early as August 21, which is specially valuable because it included commercial firms and wholesale and retail dealers as well as industry, and it was made during the period of the first moratorium and before there had been time for readjustment. The London figures are given on p. 11.

UNITED KINGDOM.

Industrial occupations, not including transport or direct Government work.

Per 1,000 Males or 1,000 Females employed in July 1914.¹

	Employed.					Known to have joined the forces.
	Over-time.	Normal time.	Short time.	All.	No longer employed.	
<i>Males.</i>						
September	36	602	260	898	102	88
October	52	668	173	893	107	106
December	130	656	108	894	106	133
<i>Females.</i>						
September	21	535	360	916	84	—
October	59	619	260	938	62	—
December	108	669	191	968	32	—

¹ The table should be read as follows: In the United Kingdom for 1000 males employed in July, 898 were still employed in September (of whom 36 were on overtime, 260 on short time, and 602 on normal time); the remaining 102 were no longer employed, but 88 of these were known to have joined the forces.

When the number in the last column is greater than in the last but one, fresh men must have been taken on in employment.

LONDON.

Industrial occupations, not including building, transport, or direct Government work.

Per 1,000 Males or 1,000 Females employed in July 1914.

	<i>Employed.</i>			<i>No longer employed.</i>	<i>Known to have joined the forces.</i>
	<i>Normal or overtime.</i>	<i>Short time.</i>	<i>All.</i>		
<i>Males.</i>					
August 21 .	700	215	915	85	60
September 11 .	650	210	860	140	85
October 16 .	738	125	863	137	102
December 11 .	818	67	885	115	130
<i>Females.</i>					
August . .	515	395	910	90	—
September . .	575	320	895	105	—
October . .	760	170	930	70	—
December . .	840	105	945	55	—

Commercial Occupations and Wholesale and Retail Dealing.

Males.

August . .	865	45	910	90	75
September . .	837	38	875	125	117
October . .	845	20	865	135	130
December . .	810	10	820	180	185

Females.

August . .	765	192	957	43	—
September . .	880	80	960	40	—
October . .	890	95	985	15	—
December . .	895	90	985	15	—

We are now in a position to give an account of the state of employment in industrial occupations taken all together. In London a fortnight after the declaration of war only 70 per cent. of the workmen and 52 per cent. of the workwomen were in full employment; but only 9 per cent. of each were no longer employed, the remainder being kept on short time. There was a very creditable and successful effort made to spread out work in all districts and all industries. There is no published

record of the number of hours worked by those on short time, but it is probable that few lost more than half their wages in August, while by October the majority of them did at least three-quarters of their full work. Of the men who were no longer employed, two-thirds were known to have been called up as reservists or to have enlisted, so that the increase of actual unemployment of men was only 2½ per cent. of all concerned. This statement excludes building, for conditions in that industry were not comparable with others; the truce in disputes that was arranged in August had the effect of increasing the employment by the execution of delayed contracts, and also it presumably transferred many men from 'dispute benefit' to 'unemployment benefit' and entitled them also to insurance payments, thus inflating the August percentages of columns 1 and 2, p. 7. The condition of women's employment, on the other hand, gave occasion for very serious anxiety, for it was doubtful whether even the partial employment existing could be maintained.

In September 5 per cent. more men in London had lost or left their employment, of whom half had joined the forces, and the number on short time was unaffected. With women there was on the whole a slight improvement, for 6 per cent. had been transferred from short time to whole time, while only 1½ per cent. had lost work completely since the previous account. The report for the whole country was similar to that for London, but rather more favourable. Recruiting accounted for nearly all the men unemployed, but short time was rather more prevalent. A smaller proportion of women were without work, but (owing mainly to the condition of the cotton trade) a larger proportion were on short time. It was generally felt after comparison of all the

information, summarized on pp. 7, 10 and 11, that the worst of unemployment was over, and it was known from other sources that distress was less acute.

The immediate problem was to increase the employment for women in London and Lancashire. In London workrooms were opened with a fair measure of success; and great, and ultimately successful, efforts were made to spread out, and place where most needed, the greatly increased quantity of Government contracts. In Lancashire little could be effected immediately.

In October every index in both tables shows a favourable movement. Recruiting had taken as many men as had lost work; short time had become less frequent, and in London (at any rate) it was seldom more than one-quarter's time that was lost; but women's unemployment was still so common as to be serious. The difficulty was by that time small enough to be grappled with, but it was incorrect to assume (as was commonly done) that there was no further problem as regards women and girls.

By December the demand for men could no longer be met and overtime was not uncommon, though short time also existed. In London and in the rest of the United Kingdom more men were accounted for as in employment or with the forces than had been employed in July.¹ It is not clear whence these men came, for the excess would have needed the great part of those who appear in columns 1, 2, 3 (p. 7) as unemployed in July, and as a matter of fact the percentages, &c., in December are little below those in July. Other reserves of labour must have been tapped, unoccupied and partly occupied persons diverted into industry, boys pushed forward, and

¹ Of course, recruiting from other occupations or from the unoccupied does not affect these figures.

old men retained. With women a great improvement was shown, though employment was not yet normal. Outside Lancashire there was as much overtime as short time, but there were still 3 per cent. completely unemployed in addition to the small number out of work in July. Domestic service is not included.

In January there was an improvement in the cotton industry, and a general demand for men. There was a slight set-back in women's employment on the whole ; the linen, hosiery, lace, shirt, pottery and glass industries were each in a slightly worse condition than in December. The number of women of the live register is still increasing a little in February.

Turning now to commercial occupations in London (banking, insurance, &c., wholesale and retail dealing), in which clerks and shop assistants form the principal classes, we find similar phenomena month by month, but in a less acute form. Enlistment accounted for the men who had left their occupations more rapidly and completely. Short time was hardly serious, even for women, by the middle of September, and unemployment for women was only 1½ per cent. in October. A number of women were transferred, in banks and elsewhere, to work formerly done by men.¹

The general conclusion as to the state of employment in February 1915 is that there is a widespread unsatisfied demand for men, co-existing with a small number unemployed who cannot as yet be fitted into any of the vacant places, either because the class of work they are accustomed to is not in demand, or because they are incapable of regular work. The great majority

¹ 'To-day the L.C.C. increased the wages of women temporary clerks from 25s. to 35s. a week. Since the war men clerks cannot be secured.'—*Pall Mall Gazette*, Feb. 16, 1915.

of women are in regular work, some are working overtime, more are on short time, but there is also a proportion out of work, about as large as in an ordinary year of rather slack trade. So favourable a Report as this would not have been anticipated last August ; it could have been foretold that some industries would be very busy, and that enlistment would give some relief, but it was expected that there would be districts and trades where the raw material was seriously short (which is occurring only in the linen manufacture and in a few other not very important cases) or where the demand, whether for home use or for export, was so ineffective as to leave large numbers out of work, and elaborate preparations were made to meet the expected difficulties in the winter. The reasons why these forebodings have not been realized are threefold. First, no one had had any experience of war on so large a scale, and, even if it was believed that Lord Kitchener's larger demands would be met, it was hardly realized that an army at war in winter needs continual replenishment of supplies other than arms and ammunition, and that an army in training eats heartily and needs a complete outfit of new clothes as well as rifles. Secondly, the very great elasticity of our industrial system, supposed to be over-specialized and unenterprising, was not taken into account, nor the enormous advantage of drawing materials from every country in the world, which has enabled traders to increase their supplies from a great miscellany of sources and so replace those which are closed. Judging from the detailed statistics of external trade, we may even expect that the difficulty of manufacturers will soon be, not to obtain orders, but to find labour to carry them out. Thirdly, people had underrated the general industrial and social intelligence of the ordinary members of the community,

who in fact obtained a very rapid grasp of the situation and of the possibilities of ameliorating it. It was not realized that the mechanism and means of obtaining information of the Government Departments (especially the Treasury, the Board of Trade, and the Local Government Board) are fully developed and have been greatly improved in recent years; and it was not anticipated that these Departments would at once invite and obtain the co-operation of many persons experienced in finance, in trade, or in social problems, and, avoiding the mistakes to which officials are supposed to be prone, develop immediately bold constructive policies. The machinery of the Labour Exchanges has been strained to the utmost, and has proved of enormous utility. In brief, the difficulties to be faced were not insuperable, and they were attacked with courage and knowledge.

Space does not permit an account of industries in detail, but a general view can be obtained by taking them in four groups: those producing luxuries or goods whose purchase can be postponed, those producing ordinary necessaries, those manufacturing for export, and those producing war material or rendering direct services to the Army or Navy. In August there was an immediate contraction in the first three groups, while in the fourth great activity was at once shown and has continued without relaxation up till now. The luxury trades, especially those where men are employed in large numbers—piano-making, working in precious metals, watch-making, high-class tailoring, furniture-making and printing—are concentrated to a considerable extent in London, which was thus badly affected in certain boroughs. Similar trades throughout the country, and motor-car and cycle makers, suffered at once. Women are employed more extensively in the

production of clothes than in any other group of industries, and were very badly affected both by the cessation of orders for expensive goods and the check in the purchasing of cheap clothes. Employment became very bad in the pottery district and in the lace industry of Nottingham, and in both is still far below normal. Both men and women, of all social classes, engaged in theatrical, musical, or other occupations for providing entertainment have had to face a greatly diminished demand. There was a sudden check in the employment of domestic servants. By October many of these industries had returned to a certain equilibrium ; after the loss of about 10 per cent. of their men to the Army, the orders for business printing, for everyday clothes, &c., were enough to keep the reduced staff in moderate work. Government contracts were deliberately spread out so as to reach the partly employed wherever possible ; and it was soon evident that a nation at war needs not only the metal-workers, the clothiers, and the preparers of food, but also the services of leather-workers, carpenters, packers, and a great number of other trades. By December there was only a relatively small body of men or women who failed to get work in their old trades, and some of these were able to adapt themselves to other work.

Persons engaged in providing the nation with its daily bread and other primary necessities—agriculturists, transport workers, dealers, and a proportion of a great number of other industries—have been throughout as busy as ever, since we have been on the whole rather better fed than usual, many of the workers are in the Army, and it has been difficult in some cases to catch up the time lost by the general disorganization of August.

The industries engaged in manufacturing for export were very badly hit. Of these the cotton manufacture is

much the most important, and it was not till December that it showed signs of recovery from the effect of the complete upset of its elaborate credit system at a time when its outlook was already bad. There is reason to think that the prospect is now favourable. In some industries the home demand was stimulated by the absence of imported manufactured goods. In others, where the export trade is only a fraction of the whole, there has been little contraction. Coal is, after cotton, the most valuable of our exports, but enlistment has completely removed any surplus of labour that might have appeared from the check in the foreign demand. Almost the whole trade of export of herrings is gone, and there was a great loss of work for the women in this seasonal industry, but the men trawl for mines instead of fish.

There is no means of knowing how many persons are employed directly by the Government or in Government contracts, but the effect of the vast demands for the service of the war are visible in every district and in a majority of industries. The railways are overworked. The docks at the Mersey and Thames are congested, and one can only imagine vaguely the pressure at Southampton. Woolwich has made demands for labour which have affected all the trades whose members can turn to arsenal work, the shipbuilding yards are overfull with work, and the manufacture of small-arms has made a similar call. The woollen industries of the West Riding cannot cope with the demand (though the worsted manufacture is not pressed), and many firms in Northampton and Leicester are very fully occupied. Clothing contracts have relieved a great part of the distress among tailors and dressmakers in London, and the Army demands for carpenters exceeded the ordinary

supply and found work for some furniture workers. These statements by no means exhaust the list.

There is little doubt that the total amount of productive work being done in the country is more than would have been accomplished by the whole of the women and girls and boys and the depleted number of men in a normal winter ; there is, in other words, enough work for all. But it would be a mistake to suppose that every individual can find employment. The older men in the luxury trades, other skilled men whom the general rearrangement of industry has displaced, women workers in lace, in earthenware, in linen, and (so far) in cotton, high-class dressmakers, and many other smaller groups, have lost a great deal of their ordinary work and cannot readily turn to other work. The reasons why so little actual distress is found in most districts are that in very many households there are two or more workers, and if one is unoccupied the others may be busy, and in a vast number of cases the payments to soldiers' dependants ease the situation.

It is difficult to find out how much transference of labour from one occupation to another there has been. Certainly the change has not been accomplished simply by the enlistment of those who have lost work, for on the one hand enlistment from many industries (e. g. mining, linen, jute, brewing) accounts for more than the contraction of employment so that new hands have had to be found, while on the other hand, a low rate of enlistment (e. g. among cotton weavers, quarrymen) has coincided with considerable unemployment. Each busy industry has no doubt called on its own reserve of labour, unskilled labour has moved to where it was wanted ; partly skilled men have been put to more skilled work ; some of the great army of machine tenders have adapted

themselves to the motions of unfamiliar machines. A few cases are recorded where men have changed their trade completely, sometimes going from skilled to unskilled work, or filling vacancies in the post office, and in some others men have been able to adapt their skill to a new process. There has also been in the textile and clothing industries an adaptation of machines together with their minders. Many people must have been rapidly trained to perform some of those simple tasks which form so large a part of modern industry. In general, it has proved that with the growth of the great new paid occupation of being trained to fight as an outlet, the whole force of labour has got itself in a wonderfully short time into a new order, where vast numbers of people are doing work of a rather different kind from what they have formerly done. In the four months after the beginning of the war about 450,000 vacancies for adults were notified to the Labour Exchanges, of which nearly 350,000 were filled; in the corresponding period for the previous year the numbers were 286,000 and 232,000.

Nevertheless the changes have not yet used up all the available labour. In many trades in most districts overtime and short time co-exist,¹ and though equaliza-

¹ STATE OF EMPLOYMENT IN DECEMBER. UNITED KINGDOM.

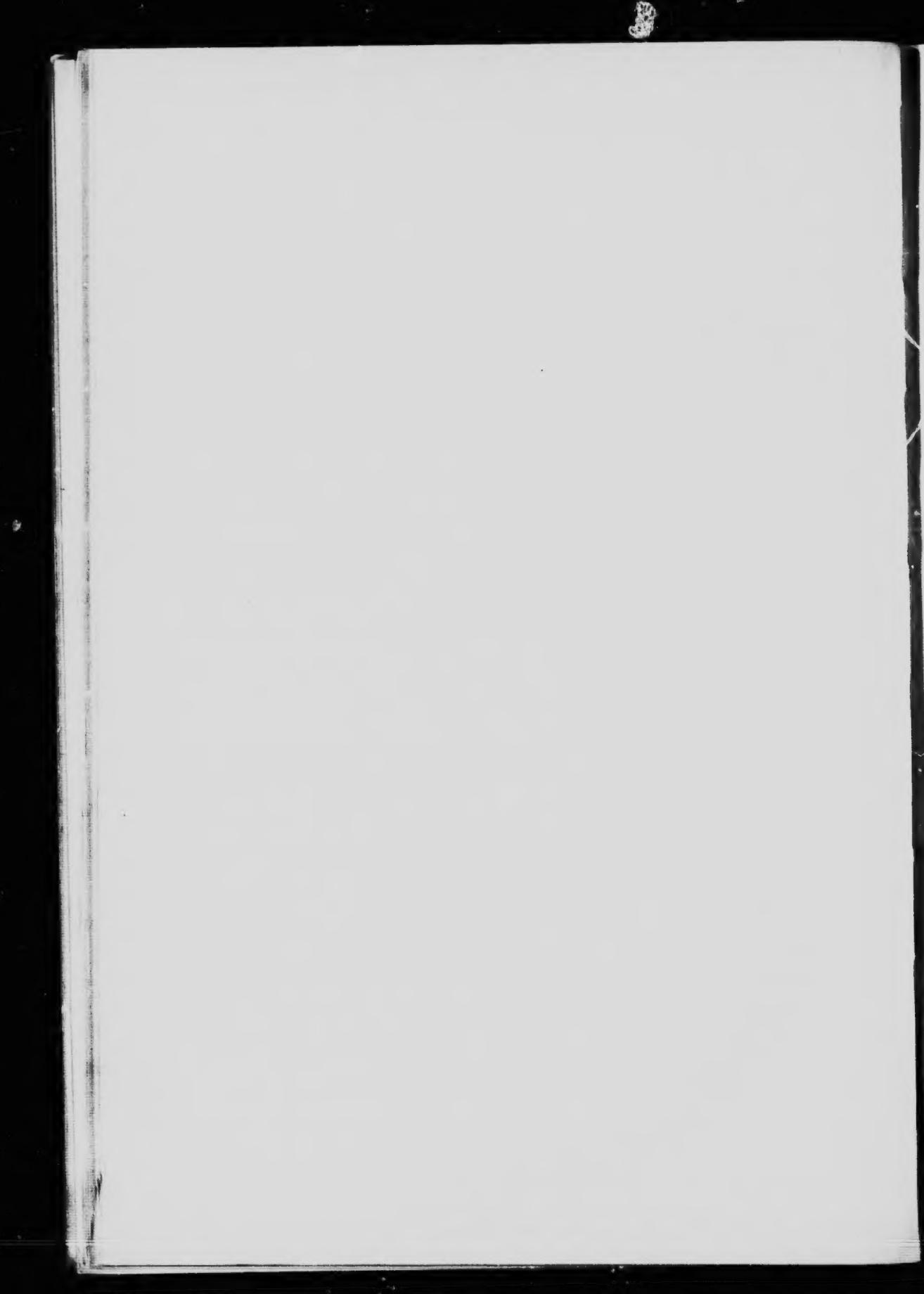
Per 100 employed in July.

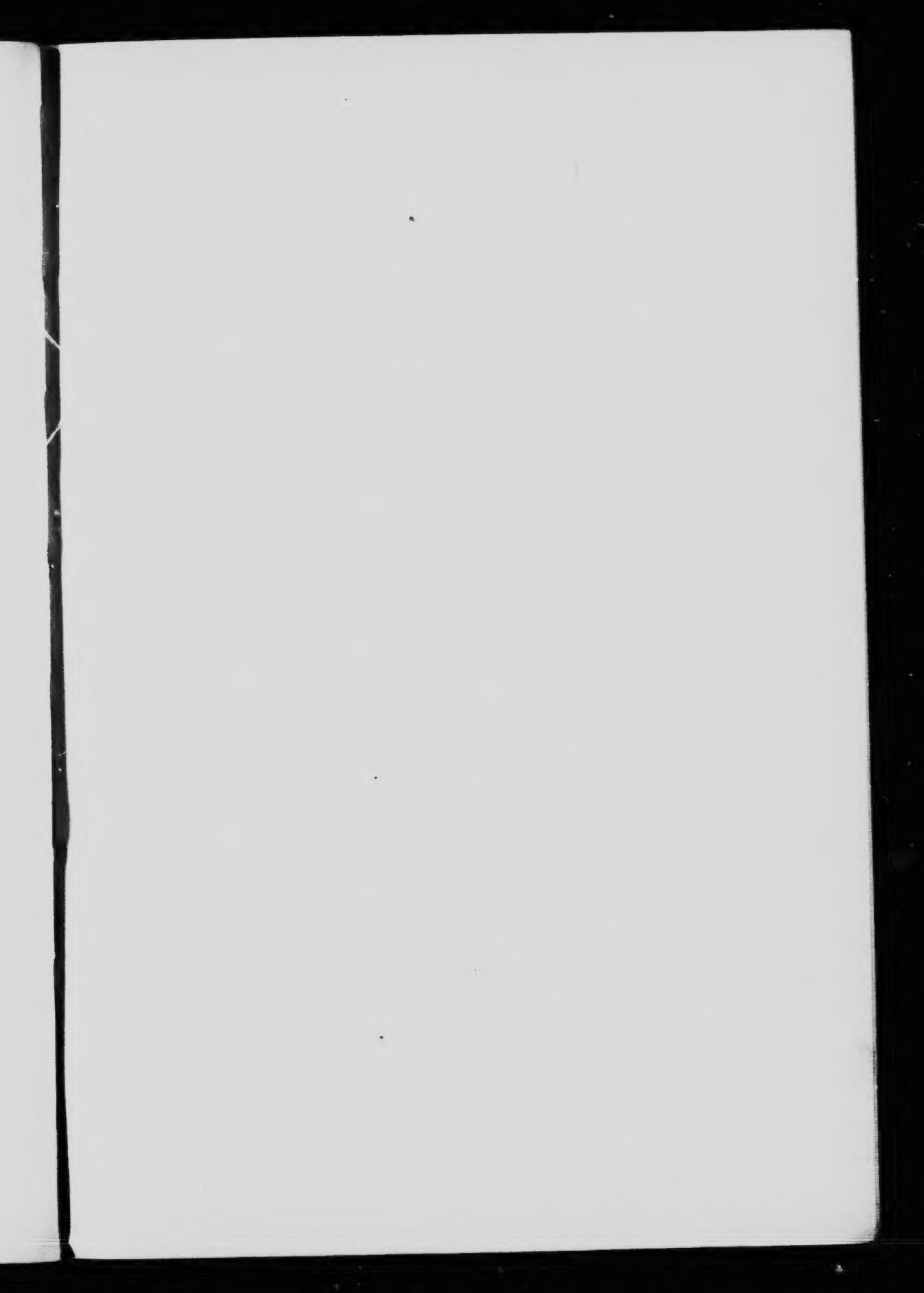
	<i>Males.</i>			<i>Females.</i>		
	<i>Left ordinary employ- ment.</i>	<i>Working over- time.</i>	<i>Working short time.</i>	<i>Increased number in employ- ment.</i>	<i>Working over- time.</i>	<i>Working short time.</i>
Iron and Steel	7.5	12.1	7.1	—	—	—
Timber	6.2	13.9	13.5	—	—	—
Leather and Leather Goods	6.3	29.8	4.5	10.1	22.5	7.3
Hosiery	7	22.2	3.0	7.8	20.5	5.1

(Extracted from Cd. 7755.)

tion is generally difficult, it is probable that the work can with care be better spread out. There are few useful men quite out of work, but there is a considerable number of women and girls on short time or seeking employment, and a further great number of women in all classes who are usually not producing anything of real utility. It is for women to organize this force to supplement men's work or allow men to join the forces, if any further needs are apparent.

There seems no reason to be over-anxious as to employment when the war is over. The return from the colours and the closing down of production of war necessaries can hardly be much more abrupt than the disturbance of the last year. The nation will still need to be fed ; many of those contracts and purchases which have been postponed for want of credit or income or inclination for enjoyment, or have not been carried out for want of material or labour, will take effect. While we shall find the purchasing power of the belligerent countries greatly diminished and exports to them slow to recover, we shall also find some slackening in their competition both at home and abroad ; and, as regards our export trade to neutral countries, it seems probable that quite soon they will be desiring more than we, with our curtailed labour force, can supply, and if such a state of things exists at the conclusion of the war there will be a brisk foreign and colonial demand. No doubt there will be temporary trouble and individual hardship, but the wonderful elasticity in production, which has been so useful for the purposes of war, will be equally available for the service of peace.





WHY WE ARE AT WAR

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